



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*** STATE OF EDUCATION ***

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

State of Education Address

Capitol Rotunda, Madison —September 20, 2007

Thank you, Jonah (Siegel) for that kind introduction. Congratulations to both Jonah and Katy, Badger State Superintendents, and thank you for your participation today.

Thank you to the UW-Madison Brass Quintet and to Letrice Stanley for your inspiring national anthem,

We have in attendance today a number of distinguished individuals I would like to introduce. Please stand.

- First Lady Jessica Doyle, you are truly a champion for public education, and we thank you for all you do.
- Constitutional Officers:
 - Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen,
 - State Treasurer Dawn Marie Sass, and
 - Former State Superintendent Barbara Thompson.
- Supreme Court Justices:
 - Ann Walsh Bradley and
 - Patrick Crooks.
- The heads of our institutions of higher education:
 - Kevin Reilly, President of the University of Wisconsin System;
 - Dan Clancy, President of the Wisconsin Technical College System; and
 - Rolf Wegenke, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.
- State department secretaries:
 - Lorrie Keating Heinemann of the Department of Financial Institutions;
 - Celia Jackson of the Department of Regulation and Licensing; and
 - Rick Raemisch of the Department of Corrections.
- State legislators who are with us today include Senators:
 - John Lehman,
 - Mark Miller, and
 - Jim Sullivan.

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- And Representatives:
 - Andy Jorgensen,
 - Sondy Pope Roberts,
 - Christine Sinicki,
 - James Soletski,
 - Barbara Toles,
 - John Townsend, and
 - Josh Zepnick.

As well as any other elected officials who may have joined us, please join me in showing our appreciation for their public service.

We recognize the excellent team directors and all the staff at the Department of Public Instruction, the CESAs, WEAC, and AFT-Wisconsin; the many individuals and organizations in this state who support education.

And a special welcome to Miles Turner of WASDA and all of our district administrators from throughout our great state.

I am honored to serve as your elected state superintendent, and to report to you that public education is moving Wisconsin forward.

Educated students become educated adults, adults with the power to change their own lives and to achieve their dreams.

Wisconsin has a long progressive tradition of quality education, from establishing our country's first kindergarten over 150 years ago to world class higher education and public libraries that daily serve all the people of our state.

Today, we are still leading the way.

- Wisconsin ranked among the top states in this year's Quality Counts national report for K-12 achievement and a child's chances of success in life.
- Our high school graduation rate is in the top five in the nation, and more students than ever before took the ACT, with the highest score in seven years.
- More students, including students of color, took Advanced Placement exams and scored higher than ever before. Our AP expansion grants are working.
- We saw gains at nearly every grade level in mathematics and rising or stable scores for reading on our statewide testing.
- Expansion Management magazine identified school districts in the Madison area as No. 1 in the nation for mid-sized metropolitan areas and school districts in Sheboygan, Eau Claire, and Wausau in the top ten for small metro areas.
- More than 60 percent of Wisconsin school districts now offer 4-year-old kindergarten with the number of districts offering this vital program doubling over the last six years.
- Our initiatives to increase global literacy among our students have earned national awards for three years in a row. We are currently training the first generation of our Critical Language Fellows, who are fluent speakers in Mandarin and Arabic, to become certified teachers.

Here with us today are two education delegations: one from Thailand, one from Japan. Would you please stand. They are in Wisconsin to learn from us and we from them. Join me in welcoming these honored visitors to Wisconsin.

We are now in the third week of school. Children are engaged in their learning, homework assignments are being turned in, school open houses are being held, and yet we do not have a state budget. We are the only state not to have a budget. The 2007-09 state budget is now nearly three months late, and Wisconsin students, families, and schools can't wait any longer. They need to know how much state support is coming to their local schools.

I renew my call to the Legislature to do its job and pass a state budget that truly provides the resources needed for the quality education that our students, parents, educators, and communities expect and deserve.

Wisconsin will be stronger for it.

All the remarkable strides that Wisconsin is making in education have been accomplished despite a very challenging environment. We are working under state-imposed revenue caps, declining enrollments that reduce funding in many districts, rising costs and a federal education law in need of revision.

Although our students have been among the most successful in the nation for the past century, public education in Wisconsin is now threatened. From our largest urban to our smallest rural districts, there is a rising inequity in educational opportunity for our children.

We are national leaders in high school graduation rates, but it is still not enough when one out of every 10 Wisconsin high school students fails to graduate on time. And, the reality is even worse for our students of color.

Education is at a crossroads in Wisconsin.

Districts are closing schools, cutting programs, and eliminating services. Fifteen years of revenue caps are impacting classrooms at the same time an increasing number of children are living in poverty, the percent receiving free or reduced-price lunch is now at 32 percent statewide. The growth of poverty is occurring in schools across our state from Bayfield, at 69 percent, to Beloit, at 71 percent, and in our largest city, Milwaukee, at over 79 percent.

The costs of federal mandates, including increased data collection and testing under No Child Left Behind, have exceeded federal funding.

Educational opportunities for students are being limited at the same time we are increasing accountability for student achievement.

Together, we must work for change at the local, state, and national level. We look for changes to federal education law that will empower our public schools to achieve the intent of the law. To move from no child left behind to every child a graduate.

We are committed to our New Wisconsin Promise to raise the achievement of all students, no matter their race, ethnicity, the educational or economic level of their parents, or where they live in our state. This is not only a moral issue and a civil rights issue. It is an economic imperative.

Wisconsin's business community tells us they need graduates who are creative and innovative, who can think critically, who have interpersonal and communication skills, who are responsible and ethical, and who understand other cultures.

Our partners in higher education and workforce development agree that education is the engine for long-term economic growth.

To ensure that our students excel on the world stage, we are aligning prekindergarten through grade 12 education with postsecondary and workforce expectations. To support this we have engaged two national initiatives: the American Diploma Project, and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. We are bringing people together through our New Wisconsin Promise to review our high school English/language arts and mathematics standards to ensure the rigor and relevance needed to prepare our students for today's and tomorrow's world.

Wisconsin has long been a leader in education, and for much of that success, we have to thank our progressive leaders of the past. How did they do it? How did they strive to create the society they envisioned, when they were living in a society so different from what they wanted?

They worked for it. They came together, faced every problem that stood between their world and the world they wanted. They persisted and never lost the vision.

And, now in these challenging times, to move Wisconsin forward we need that same persistence and steadfast vision. Public education is the foundation of our democracy. We must continually strive for our highest ideals for public education in Wisconsin.

This generation will define what it means to be an American in the interconnected world of the 21st century. One hundred years ago, we prepared students to compete with their neighboring communities, 50 years ago with other states. Now, our children must be ready to match knowledge and skills with students around the world. Our children must meet world-class standards, and they need to know the world like they know their neighborhood.

At this critical crossroads, we need statewide resources and strong local partnerships. We must face our challenges head-on. We must analyze them with the sharp mind of a mathematics teacher, we must inspire with the passion of a music teacher, and we must problem-solve with the creativity of a kindergarten teacher.

We must be steadfast in our vision for public education: a vision that lifts individuals and the larger society. A vision that supports democracy, a thriving economy and the well-being of the people of Wisconsin.

Thank you.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTE: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>.